



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE

Old and New Testament Student

VOL. XIV.

MARCH, 1892.

No. 3.

A SERIES of editorial remarks in THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT STUDENT for December, 1891, has occasioned extensive and unfavorable criticism. They have been interpreted as a deliberate attempt to get rid of the Messianic element in Old Testament prophecy, and to reduce the prophecy itself to a purely human utterance concerning things that lay wholly within the times-horizon of the prophet. That these remarks, with such an interpretation put upon them, should have been regarded as "very mischievous" in their tendency, as "exorbitant claims made in the name of science," as "both untrue and absurd" is natural. The only occasion for surprise is that any sensible person should have indulged himself in such interpretations, seeing that the editorials in question contained no word or implication that could fairly warrant them. True, they did not pretend to a complete treatment of Messianic prophecy. Too many things, perhaps, were assumed. The writer was "very bold" in attributing to all his readers a limited acquaintance with modern hermeneutics; the commotion so innocently stirred up indicates that there are still many among the editors of the religious press who "have not so much as heard whether there be any" historical interpretation of prophecy. Some one of these belated brethren having detected, as he imagined, a strong odor of heresy raised the alarm, and forthwith a score of others took it up, many of whom, judging from their irrelevant and preposterous criticisms, had not personally investigated the matter under discussion. In reply to those who have been kind enough to read at least a part of the editorials we would say;

- 1) That their strictures fail to trouble the point at issue,

viz., *the inherent obscurity of Messianic prophecy* before its fulfilment. This obscurity cannot be appreciated by us so long as we persist in attributing to the prophets and their hearers the same understanding of prophecy as we ourselves possess. For religious and practical purposes we are constantly interpreting prophecy in the light of its fulfilment, assuming that the whole body of Messianic prophecy is an organism every detail of which points to Jesus of Nazareth; that it is the Old Testament preparation for his advent, and that we are therefore warranted in perceiving this in the Jewish Scriptures, which, as Jesus says, "are they that bear witness of me." This is entirely legitimate. It is what the church has been doing in every age since Jesus "beginning from Moses and from all the prophets interpreted to them [the two disciples] in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." It is what the church will continue to do with delight and profit till the end of time. The Holy Spirit distinctly revealed to the prophets that the superlative spiritual benefits of their mission did not accrue immediately "unto themselves, but unto us" to whom the gospel is preached (1 Peter 1:12). That is to say, they perceived that the words which they were moved by the Holy Ghost to speak, in addition to their immediate and local application, were pregnant with a divine meaning which the prophets themselves did not fully grasp, and which could not be grasped, except as a dim shadow, until that meaning became incarnate in the Son of God. Among Christian interpreters there is no controversy on this point.

What then is the difficulty? It lies right here. Following the historical tendency of our age, biblical scholars have begun to study the Scriptures historically and inductively. They ask not only, What do these Messianic prophecies mean to us, and what would the Holy Spirit have us understand by them? but how much did they mean to the prophet and those whom he addressed? Aside from any local enforcement and impending realization, did they have as large and accurate conceptions of a personal Messiah before his advent as we have subsequent to it? Obviously as much less as the conception of a laborer digging the foundation in less

than that of him who surveys the completed cathedral. The sole purpose of historical interpretation is to ascertain as far as possible, first, what local application the prophet's words may have had; and secondly, how much of Messianic import they conveyed to himself and his contemporaries. In ascertaining this it is obviously illegitimate to read into the prophecy "what can be recognized only in the time of fulfilment." The primary, historical interpretation must include, not the latent meanings, nor God's full meaning, but only what *was more or less clearly present to the prophet's consciousness*. We say "more or less clearly," since it must include not only special disclosures as to local events, but also the prophet's presentiments of a transcendently greater realization in the distant future. In some cases the former wholly obscured the latter, as the moon eclipses the sun. How inadequate this original Messianic conception really was even in its fullest form may be surmised from the difficult experiment by those who stood in the presence of Christ in recognizing him as the fulfilment. This original obscurity of the Messianic oracles characterizes all predictive prophecy. The Bible contains many yet unfulfilled oracles touching the completion of the Kingdom of God. They testify unmistakably that we are advancing toward a goal of perfection, but who now can give the faintest conception of what that glorious realization will be? Nor could the prophets materialize the shadowy outlines of the Messiah.

Now when the scientific interpreter, simply as an inductive student of history, undertakes to put himself in the prophet's place, and to define as far as he can his original and quite incomplete meaning of prophecy, he is met by the senseless cry that he is robbing it of its "strength and fulness," or "evacuating it of its supernatural contents."

2) That the alleged heresies combated by the critics are their own sheer assumptions, for which the editorials referred to furnish no ground whatever.

It is assumed that the editorials *deny* that the prophets had any idea of a larger and more remote fulfilment than that

which lay within their own times-horizon; that they disclosed anything that could not be discerned by ordinary penetration and sagacity; that they addressed other ages than their own; that Messianic prophecies contain any predictions of a Messiah; that God had anything to do with Old Testament prophecy!

It is assumed that the editorials *affirm* that there can be no historical interpretation until all references to a future Messiah have been ruled out; that Christ and the evangelists "read into" the ancient prophecies all that they pretended to find of Messianic prediction, but which was not really there; that for us to-day to give any Messianic interpretation to prophecy is "clearly illegitimate."

One or another of these assumptions lies at the foundation of all the criticisms that have appeared, but in the utterances criticised there is not a shadow of excuse for a single one of them. The objectors err in not discriminating between the primary and the present meanings of prophecy; in supposing that what is said in respect to the rigidly scientific interpretation of the former holds also in respect to the religious and practical interpretation of the latter. In combating the above assumptions and errors they have entirely lost sight of the main point—the inherent obscurity of prophecy. There is no desire to remove an iota of its supernatural elements.

3) That the editorials expressly guarded against such misconstructions as have been put upon them. The second half of page 323 emphasizes the divine side of prophecy as far as it was deemed necessary to emphasize a fact conceded by all Christians. It says: "That this reference to some object above the prophet's horizon did not exhaust the content of the prophecy must in most cases have been clear to the prophet himself. Out of a narrow historical present it expands into an ideal painted in far stronger colors than would be warranted had the fulfilment been limited to the immediate historical circumstances." It speaks of Christ as "their ultimate goal." Why have these statements been deliberately ignored by every one who has objected to the preceding paragraphs?

We do not charge our friends with intentional lack of candor. We cannot help thinking, however, that they are so wedded to the exclusively spiritual interpretation of prophecy, which legitimately takes account of the fulness of divine meaning, revealed to us but hidden from the prophets, that when one ventures, for exact historical purposes, to ask just what it meant to the prophet, they leap to the conclusion that prophecy is being depleted of its supernatural richness and power. This is just the reverse of the facts.

ONE cannot too strongly impress upon the biblical student the importance of right spiritual and intellectual *attitudes* toward the Object of his research. Preliminary to all study of the Bible, fundamental to it in all its course, is this primary attitude, the essential feeling, thought, regard, which the student cherishes toward it. These determine largely his path, his progress, his ultimate success in grasping the real heart of the Scriptures. Recently, in these pages, the suggestion has been made, in more than one form and connection, that the final cause of Bible study is its bearing upon the *life*. Readers may have become somewhat impatient with the repeated assertions respecting the total failure of all that study which did not issue in conduct. They may have misunderstood or declined to accept the convictions expressed, that in Bible study neither was Rationalism anything nor Orthodoxy, neither Higher Criticism nor no-Criticism, in comparison with a Bible-made *character*. Nevertheless this is profoundly true. The man whose attitude toward the Word is something less than this will never become a successful student of it. He may be able to explain its language and interpret its dark sayings but he has missed its life. How carefully, then, should one see to it that his spiritual attitude toward the Scriptures is one of utter submission to its teachings as "words of life"

A MORE difficult problem and one which has received many answers is that respecting the *intellectual* attitude which the student of the Bible should maintain. In one sense it is an-

swered in the preceding discussion. Intellect is a part of the spiritual equipment of man, and, as such, accepts, as its highest function in this sphere, the application of its results in the formation and exaltation of character. But in another and quite different sense, namely in the sphere of its investigations and inquiries into the meaning, application and elucidation of biblical truths, the question of intellectual attitude may have quite a different answer, is certainly open to discussion. An answer to this latter question is given by one earnest, learned and devout scholar as follows: "I know, only too well, that the most excellent methods and principles will never make a Bible student of any who does not *absolutely prostrate his intellect* before the Book." Is this rhetoric? The writer evidently meant it for sober, reasonable speech. What does it mean? Without doubt it embodies a great truth. The intellect of man is a finite instrument and its reasoning power is limited on all sides in its search after truth. In the Scripture, however, is some truth conveyed to the mind which it is the privilege of reason to receive, accept and commend to the spirit for obedience. There is no need nor demand that such truth be criticised, sifted, subjected to the tests of logic and science. There the attitude of the intellect may be said to be one of "absolute prostration," though the words are rather extravagant. But in general such an attitude may be questioned. Was the Bible intended for any such purpose? Did it originate in any such way? Has the man who proceeded on any such principle found success in the study of the Bible? Has not superstition, has not bigotry, always been bound up with this intellectual creed? The Scriptures came out of the minds of men whose intellects were often in critical attitudes toward their God, who questioned, doubted, discussed and were persuaded. The Bible, from this point of view, is a record of intellectual life, activity, energy, such as is seen in no other literature. In the imitation of this mental attitude, therefore, not in "absolute intellectual prostration," it would seem that the student of the Bible has better reason to be justified. The more really he can live over again in his mental life the activities that they disclose, the more fully, it would seem, he

can realize their attitudes,—by just so much he nears the intellectual goal of true Bible study. Conviction such as the biblical writers possessed, he must arrive at as nearly as possible in the way by which they attained it. If this was through “absolute intellectual prostration,” let him strive after it; if not, he may seek the “more excellent way.”

THERE was a time when assaults upon the Scriptures were made by men whose personal character was such that references to it were sufficient answers to the assaults. That time is past. It is unfortunate that the Bible should ever be attacked and that attacks are made by men of sincere and upright purposes. Defences must be prepared. They cannot consist of reflections upon the motives and characters of the assailants. They must meet these men on the common ground of the Scripture material which an attack presupposes to be brought into disrepute, while even the defence is compelled to grant that the Bible is called in question and needs the support of argument. Thus from both sides the dignity and authority of the Book is weakened. This is sad enough in any age and ours is witnessing this calamity in its extreme form. Men of noble life and utterly sincere and honest motives stand with the opposition and lend all the weight of argument and life to the thankless and, in its temporary effects at least, undoubtedly harmful task of rousing unbelief in the trustworthiness of the Bible.

It is not worth the while to ask, Who is responsible for this? It is no man's privilege to act as judge in this matter, however frequently and loudly men have claimed this privilege. There have been those who laid this responsibility entirely upon the attacking parties and have enlarged in a very impressive way upon the harvest which the sowers of such tares are sometime to reap. Others have found reason to tax the church itself with being the primary cause for such attacks, in that her claims for the Scriptures and erroneous views of their character and teachings have compelled these honest men to dissent and deny. Many would grant truth to both sides here. But of that matter, we repeat, none of us

need feel compelled to judge and we should be thankful to leave the question alone. Each one of those who numbers himself among the enemy must settle it before his own conscience and his God.

STILL the enemy is here and striking at the fortress from every side. There can be no doubt of this. Biblical "facts"—men have ceased to employ the phrase but must needs speak of biblical "questions." Everything is in solution. Every date and doctrine is encircled with interrogation points. The particular sphere of conflict, if one can distinguish in the midst of the general confusion, is the historical element of the Scriptures. Is the Bible history credible at all? If so, to what extent? Is it all trustworthy? These are the points where the battle rages most fiercely. That the Bible as history is not at all credible or even trustworthy is a view which in our day has been totally and triumphantly refuted. It has been done in a way which none expected, by the pick and spade, by facts dug up from Mesopotamian and Egyptian dust and sand heaps. The Old Testament, by some regarded as the realm of fantasy and fable, is in its historical element generally trustworthy. Such a statement passes everywhere among scholars without denial. No one who accepts facts can deny it. Every month makes it stronger. Every year of discovery and decipherment puts it beyond the possibility of denial. That this biblical history is in all its parts credible and in accordance with fact is not so generally accepted. The oriental discoveries are thought to offer, along with their supports and confirmations, some disagreeable divergences. They raise some hard questions, while they answer satisfactorily so many others. Scholars are not in a position yet to determine the final results. The immense variety of material and the immense labor demanded of specialists in estimating its value unite in delaying conclusions. It is too soon to call upon the enemy to surrender unconditionally or to abandon what we may for the moment fear to be a shattered fortress. Untenable positions are being abandoned everywhere and they cannot be left to soon.

Caution, common sense and patience are required of every defender and are worth more than the most deafening clamor at a point which clearly must soon be yielded to the foe. We hear too much of this kind of bluster,—usually just before the white flag is run up!

Even should it sometime become necessary for us to grant an element of inaccuracy and untrustworthiness in the biblical historical narratives and to fall back on the, even now, secure position that, in the main, they possess eminently historical truthfulness, this may not prove to be so disastrous. At present men are beginning to see that behind the history was the moral and spiritual purpose which inspired the narrator. The Old Testament is prophetic where it is most historic. This it is which is enduring—the moral and spiritual element. This makes the unity, the triumphant unity. This is the inexplicable element, the supreme and abiding miracle. No searchings of sand heaps or analyses by microscopic critics can ever reach this indestructible essence. The Bible's life,—enemies can pick at the skin, they can never pierce the heart. The Bible's light,—men can peer at it through many colored glasses, they cannot put it out. The absolutely secure, the fundamentally immovable, reproducing itself in every age, adapting itself to every sphere, the moral and spiritual element of the Scriptures leads the student and leaves him in the presence of God, its only sufficient explanation and its eternal source.